

Fairhaven Neighborhood and Urban Village Master Plan

Recap of Public Meeting #2

Materials: Powerpoint presentation
Various maps of parks and open space were provided
City Parks map of Fairhaven and Larrabee area trails and parks
Approximately 35 people in attendance.

Meeting opened with Jeff Thomas – introductions and review of the project scope.

Nicole Oliver provided a recap of the SWOT analysis and boundary exercise (see PowerPoint for highlights). Noted staff had been invited to Fairhaven Neighbors June 1st meeting to discuss residential transition zones.

Steve Sundin, Environmental Planner – Reviewed the Shoreline Master Program, noting that DOE was holding a hearing next Wednesday, May 25th to review comments before they make a decision on our plan. Reviewed the Waterfront Futures Group vision for Fairhaven that involved mixed uses east of the lagoon and north along the shoreline (Reid Boilerworks area). The proposed SMP designations for Fairhaven are Urban Maritime around the ferry terminal and boatyard, then change to Urban Conservancy around Padden Lagoon and northwards towards the Chrysalis. Urban Conservancy allows for 100 foot buffers and mixed use. He explained the rich aquatic system and marine life that exists just north of the lagoon opening. This is an area that is targeted in the SMP for enhancement.

Urban Maritime designations are for water-dependent uses and do not require buffers or height limits. They are rare and used for areas that are well-developed and well-used such as the ferry terminal and shipyard areas.

In urban conservancy zones, there are requirements for public access and environmental enhancements that much go along with any development proposal. Steve explained the difference between SMP jurisdiction (200 feet from marine shorelines) and buffers (required in certain zones). The SMP is an overlay that applies to anything within 200 feet of shore. The SMP jurisdiction extends to McKenzie up Padden Creek (intertidal zone), and where the SMP leaves off, the CAO starts. Some discussion ensued regarding flows in Padden Creek as they are nearly enough to warrant designation under the SMP, but so far have not been adequate for DOE to designate them.

Greg McHenry, Port of Bellingham Planning Department – Explained the Port of Bellingham's fairly recent update to the Fairhaven Scheme of Harbor Improvements, which he led, and the input from neighbors that they considered during this process. Specifically Greg referred to the future use of the Fairhaven Marine Industrial Park east of the lagoon. The Port considered continuing with industrial as well as rezoning to mixed use, however the Port Commission felt it was essential to continue with marine industrial to ensure the continuation of the industrial jobs and potential for future marine industrial tenants in that area. The size of the property was one of the few that allowed for a larger potential tenant. Greg noted that the Port felt the

life of the buildings in that location would be at least another 20 years. They anticipated that future mixed use was more possible north of the developed and leased areas, and that discussions about future pedestrian access have been ongoing, including establishing connections to the south bay trail.

Greg went on to note that the Port is a part of the Bellingham Bay Pilot, and that the area occupied by the Fairhaven Marine Industrial Park is a contaminated area. Testing done at the shore have come up clean, likely because the asphalt of the area has kept the contaminants contained. The cleanup of this area is not slated for another 5-10 years (via RIFS) because it is a lower priority than other shoreline cleanup sites that are not contained. Exploring the feasibility of expanding the estuary or pulling back the edge to the east of the lagoon is something referred to in the Scheme of Harbor Improvements, but is not something that is likely to happen any time soon.

Kim Weil, Environmental Planner for the City, detailed the Critical Areas located in Fairhaven, including the wildlife, wetlands and especially the Great Blue Heron colony at Post Point. She explained how the Critical Areas ordinance regulates Padden Creek, and how upstream day lighting projects are coming to fruition after years of planning. Kim spoke about the water quality and temperature in Padden Creek, and how forest canopy has been very helpful in keeping the water cool for the different species that inhabit the creek.

Tim Wahl, Greenways Program Coordinator for the Parks Department, talked about the history and acquisition of parks and trails in and around Fairhaven. He noted that the estuary is 21 years old, and is man-made. He commented on the extensive ownership of open space by the Larrabee family, and how the lower interurban trail system is an asset and focus for Parks. No major capital improvements are planned for the area, as it is well served compared to other parts of the city, and very well-connected by trails. Parks is looking at acquiring a last piece of property right around Padden Creek. He spoke about the quality of habitat within the estuary, and how it has been re-evaluated over time. He reiterated the high value ecosystem located just north of the mouth of the estuary as a wonderful area for foraging fish. Some discussion ensued regarding stormwater and the volume of untreated stormwater that enters the creek at Harris Avenue.

Following the presentations, participants spent about 20 minutes discussing questions with staff and examining maps around the room. The meeting reconvened to take any input or provide comments on the draft chapter pertaining to Natural Environment, Parks and Recreation.

Matt Christman suggested creating a green zone around commercial to protect residential east and north of core. Want to “containerize” commercial core and avoid encroachment.

Bill Geyer noted that a key part of urban village planning involves bringing more people closer to the urban core, while stabilizing the “zone of investment.” A green buffer would work

against that principle. The Padden Creek area already buffers the residential areas to the south and west of the core.

Christman noted the potential land swap on 14th with Haggen as part of their rezone and street vacation to continue that green, open space buffer along 14th.

Michael Lillilquist stated he appreciates this discussion and noted it is a conversation about transition zones, which is critical and has been the focus in past urban village planning projects.

David Moody – commented re type of street tree – important to keep in mind for view protection and root impacts.

Wendy Scherrer – wants to incorporate the urban forestry policies in Happy Valley Neighborhood Plan into the Fairhaven plan. Nicole added there may be some other stormwater policies that could be applicable as well.

Paul James asked the plan language regarding future trail connections (last page). Suggested adding a policy to create a short term connection along 10th street as a near-term improved waterfront access rather than long-term, given what we heard tonight from the Port.

Paul Schissler noted that 14th is a transition zone. Make a definite boundary and don't let the area sprawl.

Dave Moody – look at all the other urban villages – height is staggered from the center extending outwards. Don't plan for lots of parking. 200' blocks are small compared to 1000' blocks in other areas.

Bill Geyer – noted environmental resource and waterfront connections suggestions from OFA. Daily public moorage to bring in day-use boaters – dinghies dock to access passengers (aka Friday Harbor). Dock access could be at Douglas – make a policy to tie moorage into shore. John Servais added that this is a huge potential new tourism draw, bigger than I-5, that has not been realized.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.